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AUTHOR Seguin, Barbara; Swanson, Lois
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ABSTRACT

The Virginia STEPS (Student/Teacher Education Planning System) was developed to enable adult basic education (ABE) students to become independent learners responsible for planning, carrying out, evaluating, and making adjustments in their education. ABE instructors at Blackhawk Technical College in Wisconsin have adapted the STEPS model to make their program more learner-centered. At intake, students are interviewed and guided through a goal-setting process which helps determine their educational plan. At mid-term, students are scheduled for individual student/teacher conferences in which they assess their own progress, set new goals, and change their learning program if necessary. Finally, at the end of the semester, another conference is held to determine if goals have been met or if the student should continue to the next semester. These one-on-one interviews allow students to voice their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the program and to take more responsibility for their own education. Gradually, they are guided toward becoming self-directed learners. In general, though teachers may feel there has been little measurable progress, students seem satisfied with their achievements, highlighting such accomplishments and benefits to their daily lives as "I learned to use the computer to write papers," "I'm getting better at multiplication tables," and "Reading improvement helps me with Sunday school teaching." Asked how the program might be improved, individual students suggested more hands-on learning, group work, rules and directions, and homework, but the majority of students indicated that they were satisfied with the program as it was. Handouts on the STEP philosophy, the STEP questionnaire, goal setting, individual interview questions, and student progress/planning report forms are included. (Author/ECC)

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ED 365 370

Application of the Virginia STEPS (Student/ Teacher Education Planning System) by Basic Skills Education Teachers

Presentation given at
The Community College Consortium
5th Annual Summer Institute
on
Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success

Madison, Wisconsin
June 23, 1993

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by

Barbara Seguin and Lois Swanson
Basic Skills Instructors
Blackhawk Technical College

JC 940 032

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ABSTRACT

Using a process adapted from the Virginia S.T.E.P.S. (Student/Teacher Educational Planning System), Adult Basic Education teachers at Blackhawk Technical College work at making their program more learner centered. At intake, students are interviewed and guided through a goal-setting process which helps determine their educational plan. At mid-term, students are scheduled for individual student/teacher conferences in which they assess their own progress, set new goals, and change their learning program if necessary. Finally, at the end of the semester, another conference is held to determine if goals have been met or if the student should continue into the next semester. These one-on-one interviews allow students to voice their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the program and to take more responsibility for their own education. Gradually they are guided toward becoming self-directed learners.

NOTES FOR PRESENTATION:

BARBARA SEGUIN: The Virginia S.T.E.P.S (Student/Teacher Planning and Evaluation System) was developed in Virginia by Dr. Lennox McLendon for the purpose of involving Adult Basic Education students in planning and evaluating their own education.

The goal is to involve the students in their own learning and gradually guide them toward becoming independent learners; that is, teach them how to plan, carry out, evaluate, and make adjustments in their own learning so they come to realize that learning is something they do for themselves and by themselves and for which they, themselves, are responsible.

I have been teaching in adult basic education programs since 1972. During that time, my research and experience has led me to believe that adults must become responsible for their own educational process if they are to stay with it and achieve their goals.

In our program we adapted the S.T.E.P.S to fit the needs of our students, but the basic concept is the same: leading students toward independent, self-directed learning. We will tell you what we are doing in our program and hope you will share with us the things you are doing to help your students become more involved in, and more responsible for, their own educations.

Basic Education students, as you know, bring a lot of problems with them: family, health, housing, employment problems - you name it. Education is usually not the highest priority in their lives- they are often having enough trouble just surviving. Often they come to school because some counselor or agency told them this is what they had to do in order to get training to get a job. They may have been unsuccessful in elementary and high school. They have probably developed poor self esteem. They are accustomed to being told what to do. They come to us without much real hope or investment in the idea of education. They expect us to tell them what they have to do to get the training or education they need to get a job.

But our philosophy is that adults are capable of directing their own learning if given the opportunity, and that they will stay with it longer and take more personal pride in it if it is their own plan and not something imposed by a teacher or counselor.

Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander School in Tennessee, stated his goals this way: "Since I chose to work with poor, oppressed people, I had to take into consideration that they'd never been allowed to value their own experience: that they'd been told it was dirt and that only teachers and experts knew what was good for them. I knew that it was necessary to do things in the opposite way, to draw out of people their experiences and learn from them. It was essential that people learned to make decisions on the basis of analyzing and trusting their own experience, and learning from that what was good and what was bad..."

Friere taught us that education should be liberating; that those who had been illiterate should begin to reject their role as "objects" and undertake to become "subjects" (actors) in their own destiny.

Malcom Knowles tells us "....We have finally really begun to absorb into our culture the ancient insight that the heart of education is learning, not teaching, and so our focus has started to shift from what the teacher does to what happens to the learners. "

We try to put these ideals into practice by sitting down with our students and trying to find out where they are coming from; what they really want to learn, how they honestly feel about learning; and how we might change the process so they can be successful. I think that just being listened to in a respectful way helps our students to feel better about themselves and more in control of their own lives.

Let's briefly go through the Virginia STEPS as they were originally written; then Lois will tell you how we have adapted them for use in our program.

See handout, S.T.E.P.S.

LOIS SWANSON: I am a Basic Skills Instructor at Blackhawk Technical College. I don't teach at the same location as Barb Seguin; instead, I am at an outreach site, a store front, in downtown Beloit, Wisconsin. In our department Barb and I have introduced the concept of the S.T.E.P.S. strategy. The other instructors in our department have helped us to revise the process as we keep working with it year after year. We have made changes to fit the needs of our students.

I have been teaching adult learners for 10 years, part-time and full-time. During my first year as a full-time instructor, I became involved in a class where I researched strategies to help adult learners to take more responsibility for their learning.

I found that to gain rapport with the adult learner one must provide an informal, relaxed atmosphere. The relationship must be adult-to-adult. Recognition of the adult learner's experiences outside the classroom must be acknowledged.

Adult learners have a reason for learning; usually they want to improve their personal, economic, or social position. When they enter the classroom for the first time, the instructor usually knows little about their backgrounds, interests, achievements, or academic levels. We assess the students academic levels; when the battery of tests is completed, each student is given an appointment card to set a time when he or she will come in to go over the test scores and set up a schedule of classes.

During this initial appointment time, an instructor asks background interview questions to find out more about each student. We have found that taking this extra time is very helpful in understanding each adult.

*See handout, INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.

As instructors, we try to help adults realize that it is their own behavior which is mainly responsible for their learning. This means **they** control how, what, and when they learn. A student sometimes believes it is the instructor who is most responsible for learning. Teachers can show great skill in appropriate use of teaching techniques and materials, but ultimately it is the student who must take responsibility for learning.

As I researched how to help adult students to become more independent learners, I gained insight from four experts: Raymond J. Wlodkowski, Carl R. Rogers, Malcolm Knowles, and Lennox L. McLendon. I'd like to share some of their comments on adult learners.

Raymond Wlodkowski is an educator who has researched motivation of adult learners. In his book he outlines methods to increase the learner's personal control of learning:

1) Allow the learner to plan and set goals for learning.

2) Allow the learner to make choices about what, how, and when he/she is to learn something. (to take responsibility)

3) Allow the learner to use self-evaluation procedures.

4) Help the learner to be aware of personal strengths and abilities in learning tasks.

5) Let the learner record or log personal progress which allows the student to visualize learning is taking place.

6) Let the learner participate in analyzing potential blocks to progress in learning.

7) Ask the learner for a commitment to the learning task.

8) Make feedback promptly available.

Wlodkowski feels, "that learning is usually the result of a cooperative act between a learner and an instructor."

According to Carl R. Rogers, "When students understand that they are free to follow their own goals, most of them invest more of themselves in their effort, work harder, and retain and use more of what they have learned than in conventional courses."

The students are motivated to learn if they are allowed to set their own goals. Quoting Carl Rogers again, " It is when the individual has to take the responsibility for deciding what criteria are important to him, what goals he is trying to achieve, and the extent to which he

has achieved those goals, that the student truly learns to take responsibility for himself and his directions."

Understanding the importance of goal setting, we guide new students through a goal setting process which helps determine their educational plan. We accomplish this during an orientation session for new adult learners. The students keep the original, and we make a copy to place inside each student folder for future use during student/teacher conferences.

* See handout, GOAL SETTING.

In elementary and secondary schools, students find that the responsibility for their learning was placed on teachers, school officials, and parents; it is no wonder that some adult learners continue to respond as passive and dependent learners in all educational settings. They are conditioned to come in, sit back, and say, "teach me".

In his book The Making of an Adult Educator, Malcolm Knowles stated his assumptions about educating adults:

1) Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.

2) Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own lives. The usually resent situations where they feel others are imposing their will on them.

3) Adults come into an educational setting with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from children. Since their is a wide range of differences, emphasis is placed in adult education on individualization of learning and teaching strategies. For many learning experiences the richest resources are within the learners themselves. Knowles believes that an instructor should use teaching techniques that involve the experience of the learners such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, and laboratory methods. (I would add the technique of peer helping activities.)

4) Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know or to be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.

5) Adults are life centered in their orientation to learning.

6) Adults bring with them many motivators to learn such as better jobs, promotions, the desire for increased self-esteem, quality of life, responsibility, and job satisfaction.

Malcolm Knowles believes adults need to be helped to make the transition from dependent to independent learners. They need some preparation for it. When students hear

that they are going to be asked to take some responsibility for making their own decisions, it makes some of them quite nervous. We need to slowly orientate the students into this strategy. We must set the classroom atmosphere as a place where students see themselves as mutual helpers rather than as competitors, a place where trust will start growing. There is still much to learn about how to help people acquire the concepts, attitudes and skills needed to be self-directed learners.

Other educators are working on the concepts needed for helping learners to become self-directed. The fourth expert that I consulted was Lennox L. McLendon. By creating the S.T.E.P.S strategy, he found a method for involving adult students in planning and evaluating their own learning. Barb showed you the original S.T.E.P.S procedure and I would like to comment on our revised copy.

*See handout, STUDENT PROGRESS/PLANNING REPORT.

New students are assigned an advisor, an instructor who has the student for at least one class. At mid-term, students are scheduled for individual student/instructor conferences in which they assess their own progress, set new goals, and change their learning program if necessary. At the end of each semester, another conference is held to determine if goals have been met or if the student should continue into the next semester. These one-on-one interviews allow students to voice their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the program and to take more responsibility for their own education.

We are constantly revising this form, along with the others. For example, I plan to add a line on the bottom asking the student how he/she feels about doing this individual conference. I would also like to add another step towards the self-directed learner: to investigate a simple learning contract; this would add to more student responsibility towards learning.

Barb: RESULTS AND EXPERIENCES:

These are some student comments on their progress and how their education has helped them outside of school:

I learned to use the computer to write papers

I'm getting better at multiplication tables

I made progress in anatomy and physiology prep - I was able to explain to my cousin why her son needed tubes in his ears

I'm passing high school chemistry - applying it to household chemicals, food.

Reading improvement helps me with Sunday school teaching

I'm satisfied with my progress even though I'm slower than others - I go at my own

speed

I feel really good about my progress

My progress is dropping - I'm not making progress right now

I've learned more in this short time than I learned in high school

I'm able to read things with better understanding

I feel a load has been lifted from my back. It's exciting to work towards my goal.

Math is hard for me - need to practice multiplication tables

Success on the computer has changed my educational goals

I can help my son with English homework

I'm able to use recipes with fractions and understand it

I feel proud

I'm overcoming test anxiety

Any math that come up - now I can do it - or I can learn it very easily

I know more about my kid's medicines

I'm more aware of food ingredients

I'm learning things I could not learn in high school

I read the paper more and I am more aware of what's going on in my community and the world

I'm able to read directions and understand them better

I enjoy school

** **It is interesting to note that students generally seem satisfied with the progress they have made even though teachers may feel that there has been little measurable progress. Are teacher's expectations too high? Are student's too low? Are adult students good judges of their own abilities and progress? They say they are satisfied with their own attendance and the amount of time they are putting into their studies even when they are frequently absent and are not completing assignments. Their priorities are sick children, jobs, health, etc.; not**

necessarily our priorities.

These are suggestion from students as to how we might improve our program:

When doing group work, have faster students help the slower ones. Everyone likes to help others if given the chance.

More individual work

Hands on learning

Teachers doing fine. There should be more instructors in Learning Center.

I like classes better than individual work.

There is a good balance of different approaches: discussion, computers, etc.

Review fractions.

Don't schedule tests on Monday.

The teachers are doing the best they can. You're doing the best. You've got everything here.

More help with schoolwork that is hard to do without extra help/direction.

More review of decimals.

Writing practice on computer is helpful

Give more rules and directions

Transportation improvements would help.

More variety. More student/teacher interaction.

More test reviews.

Be flexible with work hours.

More homework in math.

Maybe go a little slower.

Explain, step by step.

Explain difficult topics in as many different ways as possible.

More take home work would be good.

It's really nice how the teachers spend extra time with you and are always willing to help. I love it.

I like collaborative learning

Give worksheets on punctuation.

Help when I need help and make sure I'm understanding everything.

Keep people quiet.

Give more reinforcement

Stay the same. I'm satisfied or I wouldn't be coming out.

** **These are student suggestions as to how our program could be improved. The majority of students indicated that they were satisfied vith things the way they were; however, we take student comments seriously an try to change the things that are not working.**

We hope you have gained something of value from our presentation. We are, by no means, experts. Our reading of the literature has encouraged us to experiment. We are trying new approaches, constantly modifying what we do, and little by little we are making progress. We hope you will feel free to try some of these approaches and adapt them to your own needs.

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S.T.E.P.S.

Student/Teacher Evaluation and Planning Session:

A system for involving adult students in

planning and evaluating their

own learning

Send Comments to:
Dr. Lennox L. McLendon
Adult and Community Education
Virginia Department of Education
P. O. Box 6-Q
Richmond, Virginia 23216-2060
(804) 225-2075

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT TEACHING ADULTS

I. We believe the purpose of adult education is to assist the adult learner in acquiring the skills to progress from being a dependent learner to becoming a more independent learner. Stated another way, the learner should move from teacher-directed to SELF DIRECTED LEARNING.

II. We believe each adult has unique learning needs.
   A. He or she has a PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN.
   B. That plan does the following:

      1. focuses on his or her GOALS or the reason for coming to you for assistance.
      2. helps the learner see the SEQUENCE OF SKILLS required to reach that goal.
      3. includes the RESOURCES (materials and activities) the learner will use to acquire those skills.
      4. includes the NEXT FEW SKILLS the learner will be acquiring.
      5. allows the student to progress at his or her OWN PACE.

   C. The instructor HELPS THE LEARNER PERIODICALLY TO EVALUATE the plan, to examine his or her progress, and to revise the plan based on that evaluation.

III. We believe that an adult can and should BECOME AN ACTIVE DIRECTOR of his or her learning and growth.
   A. The learner is INCREASINGLY involved in planning his or her learning.
   B. The learner is INCREASINGLY involved in evaluating his or her learning.
   C. The learner and instructor plan ACTIVITIES in which newly learned skills are applied to the learner's family, community and work world.

IV. We believe adult learning involves furthering COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS.
   A. A part of adult education involves creating opportunities in which the learner can further develop INTERPERSONAL SKILLS.
   B. Those opportunities involve the student in the further development of the following:

      1. Problem solving skills
      2. Verbal communication skills
      3. Listening skills
      4. Values appreciation and clarification skills

S.T.E.P.S.

STUDENT-TEACHER EVALUATION AND PLANNING SESSION

As often as appropriate, the teacher and the student take some time out to evaluate overall progress, to determine:

1) what parts of the instructional program the student likes and does not like,
2) what is working and what is not and,
3) to plan the next stage of instruction.

The goal is to involve the learner in planning and evaluating the student's own learning. The hidden agenda is to teach the student "how" to learn i.e. how to plan, carry out, evaluate, and make adjustments in his or her own learning activities.

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I. TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO S.T.E.P.S.

A. Determine (roughly) how much progress the student has made.

B. Determine if a diagnostic test is necessary.

II. ONE WEEK PRIOR TO S.T.E.P.S.

A. Remind the student of the upcoming S.T.E.P. session.

B. Review the purpose of the S.T.E.P. session. (1, 2, 3 above)

C. Administer the diagnostic test, if appropriate.

D. Grade the diagnostic test and record the results of the diagnostic test on Progress Sheet in student file.

III. S.T.E.P. SESSION

A. Set a relaxed atmosphere.

B. Explain session to student:

1. Role of the tutor is helper, not source of all knowledge.

2. Role of the adult student is to become increasingly responsible for own learning, move from Dependent to Independent.

3. Role of materials:

   a. Introduce new skills
   b. Practice a new skill
   c. Apply the new skill to the real world so you can use it.

C. Check progress:

1. Review diagnostic test results WITH the student,
2. Discuss student's progress,
3. Discuss his or her satisfaction or dissatisfaction with that progress.

D. Mutual Evaluation of Learning. Ask STUDENT to:

1. Examine and evaluate the materials, (one area at a time, using criteria in Section III.B.3 above.)

2. Explore student's satisfaction with his or her progress.

3. Evaluate his or her time commitment.

4. Explore student's satisfaction with the help he or she is getting from you (and other tutors, if applicable).

5. Examine how skills learned in class apply to his or her goals and everyday life.

6. Identify changes needed (by both student and tutor) to improve his or her progress.

7. Identify how the instructional plan needs to change to improve progress.

V. SET A NEW PLAN

A. Review the student's Long Range goals.

B. Set new Short Range goals.

C. Identify new skills, materials and activities to be used.

D. Set approximate date for next S.T.E.P. session.

S.T.E.P.S. QUESTIONNAIRE

* ASK QUESTIONS ORALLY AND RECORD STUDENT'S ANSWERS.
* AVOID ASKING QUESTIONS WITH A "YES" OR "NO" ANSWER.
* EXPAND ON THESE QUESTIONS AND WRITE ON BACK WHEN DISCUSSION MERITS

CHECK PROGRESS:

How do you feel about the progress you've made so far?

_____

What do you feel is your strongest area?

_____

What do you feel is your weakest area?

_____

Would you like to work in a new area(s)?

_____

Which one(s)? (give options: Reading, Writing, Math, Social Studies, Science, Life Skills) _____

_____

EVALUATE LEARNING: For EACH workbook:

What do you like about this book?

_____

What do you dislike about this book?

_____

What new skills have you learned from this book?

_____

Do you feel comfortable with the material or would you like more practice?_____

How have these new skills helped you in your "real world" life?

_____

TIME COMMITMENT:

How much time every week, including our session(s) together, do you put into your learning?

_____

How satisfied are you with the time you're putting in and the progress you've made?

_____

Would you like to make any specific changes in this time you're putting in? (in class and at home)

HELP RECEIVED FROM TEACHER/TUTOR(S):

Are you getting enough help from your teacher/tutor(s) or do you feel you'd learn more with more help?

What can teachers/tutors do to improve how you learn? (i.e. talk more/less, give more/less individual working time)

GOALS: Together, review student's goals as stated on latest PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN, then:

Would you like to add any goals to your list? _____ Which ones?

CHANGES:

What can we do as a team to improve your progress? What can we do individually to improve your progress?

What changes, if any, should we make in what you are learning? On what should we concentrate more? What less?

TOGETHER, DO ANOTHER PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN AND PUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, WITH P.L.P., IN STUDENT'S FILE.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where did you grow up?

2. What grade/age were you in, when you left school?

3. What classes did you like when you were in school? What made these classes better?

4. How did you come to leave school? What else was happening in your life at the time?

5. What did you do when you left school?

6. Tell about the jobs you have had, and if you're working now.

7. Tell about your family - for instance, do you have any children?

8. How do you use reading/writing/math in your home life?

9. How did you first hear about Adult Basic Education programs at BTC?

10. How did you come to enroll at this site?

11. Do you notice any difficulties in learning - letting us know will in turn help you.

12. Will there be any influences that make it difficult for you to attend classes regularly? Describe. How can you best handle these influences?

13. What subject areas do you really want to concentrate on?

14. What would make you feel that you completed the program successfully?

_____ _____

NAME DATE

____ Returning Student ____ New Student

GOAL SETTING

You have made that first all-important step! By deciding to enroll in classes at the Beloit Center, you have recognized that improving your basic skills is a necessary step in your long-range goal planning.

Goal setting will help you develop a plan of action to get you from where you are today to where you would like to be tomorrow. Whether your goals are getting your GED/HSED, getting a job, further training, a technical school program, personal self-improvement or college, goal planning is an important part of a successful plan. Those individuals who take the time to develop a goal setting plan can experience satisfaction and success. It can help you learn more about yourself and help you make personal and professional decisions for your future. Without a well thought-out plan, five years from now you may look around and discover this is not where you want to be.

Guidelines Toward Good Goal Setting

There are guidelines to help in setting realistic goals. Here are a few examples of what to look for in deciding what our goals are to be.

1) Be specific - Do I really know what my goal is, or is it so wishy-washy I really don't know for sure if I can accomplish anything. Here is a good example. I can say, "I will go to the Beloit Center and enroll in GED classes this Friday."

2) Be realistic - Do you set goals for yourself that you can realistically achieve? How can you tell if the goal is something you can achieve? What are your resources? What are some things against you: time, money, motivation, mental and physical abilities, or support system? An unrealistic goal would be to say you will become a doctor in two years after receiving your GED.

3) Be observable - How do you know when you actually reach your goal? Can you or others see a change? An observable goal would be "I will tell my teenager just what my feelings are."

4) Performance/involvement - Remember these are your goals (not your family's or anyone else's). The purpose is for you to be in charge of your life, and to do that, you must be involved. Does your goal require something of you instead of leaving it up to someone else? Keep in mind you can not control what someone else does, but you can be in charge of yourself. You must take responsibility for your goals. This requires your involvement.

Name_____
Date_____

Individual Goals

1) How do you feel about yourself at this point in your life?

2) What image do others have of you?

3) How necessary do you feel it is to set down goals?

4) What sacrifices are you willing to make to succeed?

5) What have you done well lately?

6) How do you handle occasional failures?

7) Describe what job you would like to do.

8) What <u>short-term</u> goal do you have in mind in one month's time, regarding progress in school?

9) What <u>long-term</u> goal are you going to work towards for this semester at the Beloit Center?

10) What would you like to be doing one year from now?

STUDENT PROGRESS/PLANNING REPORT

GOALS:

What is your goal, that is, what do you hope to accomplish by attending developmental classes or the learning lab at Blackhawk Technical College?

GED/HSED Diploma _____
Preparation for employment _____
Brush-up for a vocational program _____
Other (Please state) _____

Have you made progress toward achieving those goals?

Completed GED ____ HSED ____
Some GED/HSED tests taken (which ones) _____
Improved TABE scores ____
ASSET test taken ____
Accepted into a vocational or college program _____
Reading improvement _____
Math improvement _____
Writing skills improvement _____
Learning to use the computer _____
Other (please state) _____

STUDENT PROGRESS/PLANNING REPORT

*ASK QUESTIONS ORALLY AND RECORD STUDENT'S ANSWERS.
*AVOID ASKING QUESTIONS WITH A "YES" OR "NO" ANSWER.
*EXPAND ON THESE QUESTIONS AND WRITE ON BACK WHEN DISCUSSION MERITS

CHECK PROGRESS:
How do you feel about the progress you've made so far?

What do you feel is your strongest area?

What do you feel is your weakest area?

Would you like to work in a new area(s)? (specify)

TIME COMMITMENT:
How much time every week do you put into your learning?

How satisfied are you with the time you're putting in and the progress you've made?

Would you like to make any specific changes in this time you're putting in? (in class and at home)

HELP RECEIVED FROM TEACHER/TUTOR(S):
Are you getting enough help from your teacher/tutor(s) or do you feel you'd learn more with more help?

What can teacher/tutors do to improve how you learn? (i.e. talk more/less, give more/less individual working time)

GOALS: Together, review student's goals: Short term_____
_____ Long Term:_____

CHANGES:
What can you do to improve your progress?

What changes, if any, should we make in what you are learning? On what should we concentrate more? What less?

Have you learned any new skills that have helped you in your "real world life"?

What reactions do you have for doing such a progress report?_____

Student Signature_____
Teacher Signature_____ Date_____

PUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IN STUDENT'S FILE